

# VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

JANUARY 1991

ONE DOLLAR



# Editor's Page

*"When a man knows that he has done the right thing, the fact that he has made one or two enemies in doing it should give him no real concern."*—A. Willis Robertson, excerpted from a letter to Mac Hart, May 14, 1932.

I have never been fond of compromise. Once as a youngster, in a rare conciliatory moment, I made a birthday card for my older sister, extolling in imaginative verse how roses were red and violets blue and "no one has a sister as sweet as you." The moment did not last. My parents still treasure that card, and are quick to point out the angrily scrawled postscript I added on the back: "You old goat!"

Thus, it's difficult for me to understand how most people manage to smile sweetly at certain folks when they'd much rather be spitting in their faces. I believe it must have something to do with our upbringing. We are taught at an early age the virtues of trying to work and play with people we despise and ideas we hate. No one ever tells us why. Instead, we are halted from braining some nasty kid over the head with a stick with the admonition, "How would *you* feel if he did that to you?" And then we're forced to make up. Never mind that we might have thought the kid justly deserved a whack on the head.

I know that for the most part it is very wise, nice, and sensible to try to get along with people and work out differences, especially if you're not fond of bloody noses, broken nog-

gins or worse. But I fear sometimes that our devotion to compromise has caused us to lose sight of the virtue of taking a stand.

Too often, I think, we use the word "compromise" as a way to slide out of a sticky situation. Rather than standing firm behind our belief in what's right or wrong, we crumble under the suggestion "why don't we try to work something out?" It's hard to keep what you believe in focus when you are being entreated to "give a little."

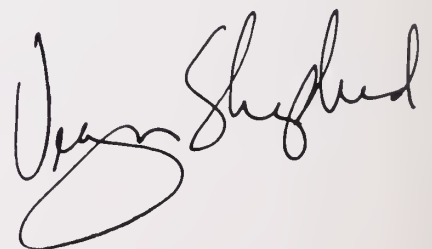
Although I suppose that mostly I believe compromise is the better part of valor and maturity and "reasonableness" in situations, there *are* times to hold the line and take the risk of gaining a few enemies who would like nothing better than to bloody your nose permanently.

It's a hard thing to ask for enemies, though. It's a whole lot easier to silence a nagging conscience with its burden of heartache and trouble by simply shrugging it off with "it doesn't really matter, anyway." But, it's becoming clear to lots of us, I think, that too much compromise, too much caving in to "working things out," has cost us dearly. We have found ourselves with shopping centers and roads and pollution we don't want, and without the wild

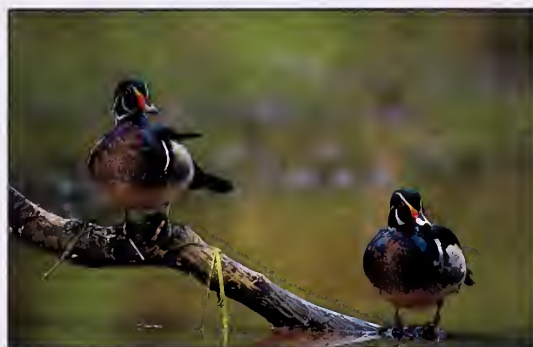
open places we really need. In our desire to make everyone just a little bit happy and no one terribly unhappy, we have lost a sense of when to stand tough and when to give in. We aren't able to hold onto what matters anymore.

My grandmother used to create great consternation in the family (and not a little admiration) for her unmatched ability to get her own way without fuss, without compromise and without hard feelings. Keeping a steady eye on her purpose, she would smile very sweetly at any opposition, while working out her strategies which never failed. My parents still laugh about how she could anticipate arguments and circumvent them, never confronting a "no" straight on (for that would be in bad taste), but delighting instead in the surprise attack to achieve her aims. Granny never knew defeat because she never lost sight of what mattered to her, and she never stopped thinking about how to get it. Plus, she never gave up. She was, after all, a great Southern lady.

In fact, I am certain she would have even known how to call a person a goat in a dignified manner.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Jean Shepherd". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping loop at the bottom.

# VIRGINIA WILDLIFE



*Bringing back waterfowl to this continent is taking a lot more than good intentions; see p. 18.*

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Cottontail rabbit; photo by Kraig Haske. Back cover: Evening grosbeak; photo by Gregory Scott.

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# Sly Fox



photo by Gary Meszaros

*The red fox is an adaptable creature, a survivor in our world of changing habitats and vanishing species.*

Well-designed to withstand the temperature extremes of both its northern and southern range, the red fox is a successful hunter that can adapt to a multitude of habitats, even those dominated by man (such as the suburbs). Worldwide distribution is indicative of its adaptability.

by Dennis Martin

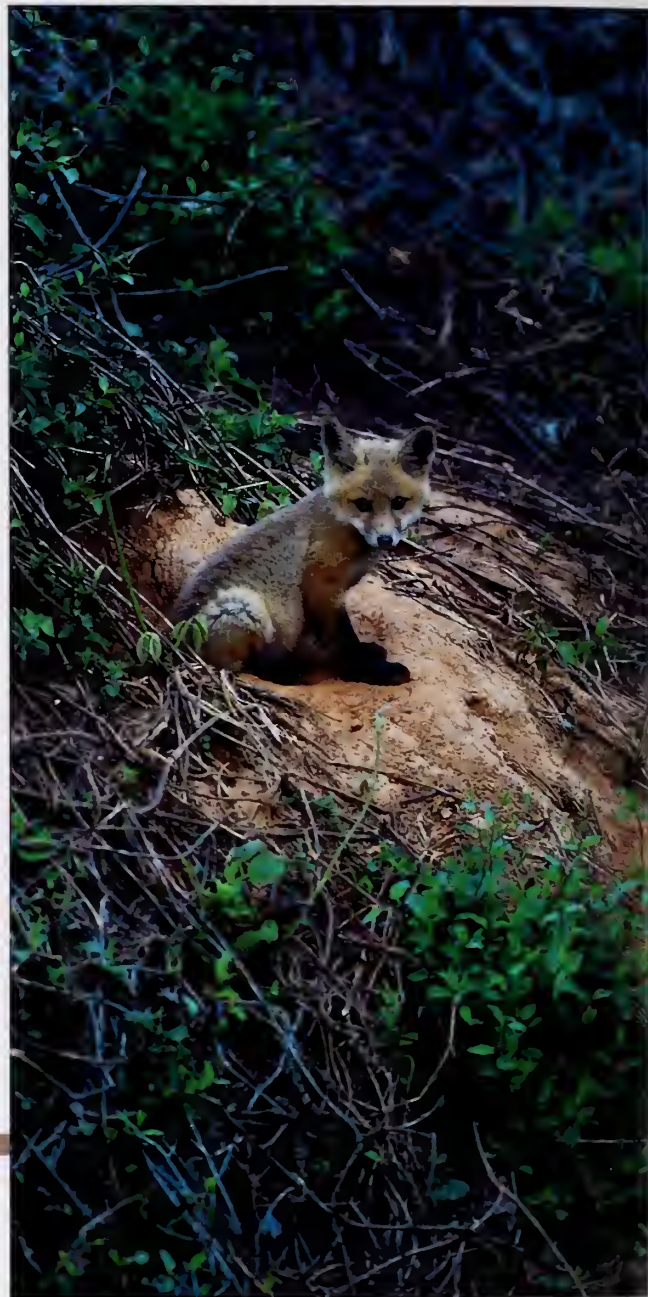
**T**he lady on the phone sounded upset. As she talked she was observing four red foxes, an adult and three pups, in the field in front of her house. The adult was acting strangely, jumping, making short runs, diving. She was concerned that seeing a fox during the day that appeared to be acting strangely could mean the animal was diseased, most likely with rabies. After explaining the feeding behavior of the red fox to her, she seemed relieved. It became clear that the vixen was catching mice and meadow voles that live in high populations in most fields, and the pups were observing and learning their mother's techniques.

Ranging from northern Canada and Alaska to Florida and Texas, and all of Europe and most of Asia, the red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) is one of the world's most widely distributed mammals. It is thought by some that the red fox was introduced into North

*Below: Predatory instincts are sharpened as the summer days get shorter, and as the juvenile red fox hunts for small rodents or birds, primarily in agricultural fields or brushy areas. These juveniles will usually disperse to fend for themselves by mid-September or October.*



*photo by Kraig Haske*



*photo by Gary W. Carter*

America about 1790. Others speculate that it was native in northern latitudes, but was scarce or absent in the hardwood forests where the gray fox was common. The southern limit about the time of American settlement (c. 1600) appeared to be Quebec, but not New England. Regardless, the red fox is a common resident in Virginia and practically every other state, with the exception of a few in the southwest.

The thick red or rufous fur of the red fox is in its prime condition by

November or early December. With black-tipped, pointed ears, slender nose and white-tipped tail it is rarely mistaken for its gray cousin, although some variation in pelage color is common. The American red will weigh 7-15 pounds with the males being slightly larger. Both the red and gray favor mixed habitats, but the red prefers agricultural lands while the gray will often choose wooded habitats.

The red fox vixen will permit breeding once a year during the win-

ter months, primarily in January, slightly earlier than their gray cousins. The pups are born 52 days later and stay in or at the den for the first month. Playing behavior in the pups offers exercise and the polishing of skills that will be required to feed themselves and escape predators. Their behavior is often much like that observed in domestic dog puppies.

High mortality of foxes results from road kills, shooting, trapping, owls, domestic dogs and disease. A



photo by Kraig Haske

*Left: A red fox den, like this one which once served as a groundhog burrow, is located in or near agricultural areas where the vixen finds the primary source of food to feed her four or five pups.*



photo by Kraig Haske

relatively new competitor for the red fox is the coyote, which in a few Southern states has caused sharp declines in the red fox populations. It is difficult to determine death rates by natural causes, but with a fairly high birth rate, the red fox is a survivor. It has been observed that as mortality rates have increased, birth rates also increase, thus stabilizing the population. Two diseases, mange and rabies, however, can cause sharp declines in numbers. Despite these pressures, populations will reach 2-3

foxes per square mile (640 acres) in good habitats.

The red fox has been known to make a meal of chicken or both domestic and wild turkey, but their diet is primarily small rodents and carrion. They also eat fruits and small birds and insects. Hunting mostly at dawn, dusk and at night, it is not uncommon to see a red fox in a field or along the road during the day.

Almost 7,000 red foxes were harvested in Virginia by trapping and hunting, as reported by fur buyers in

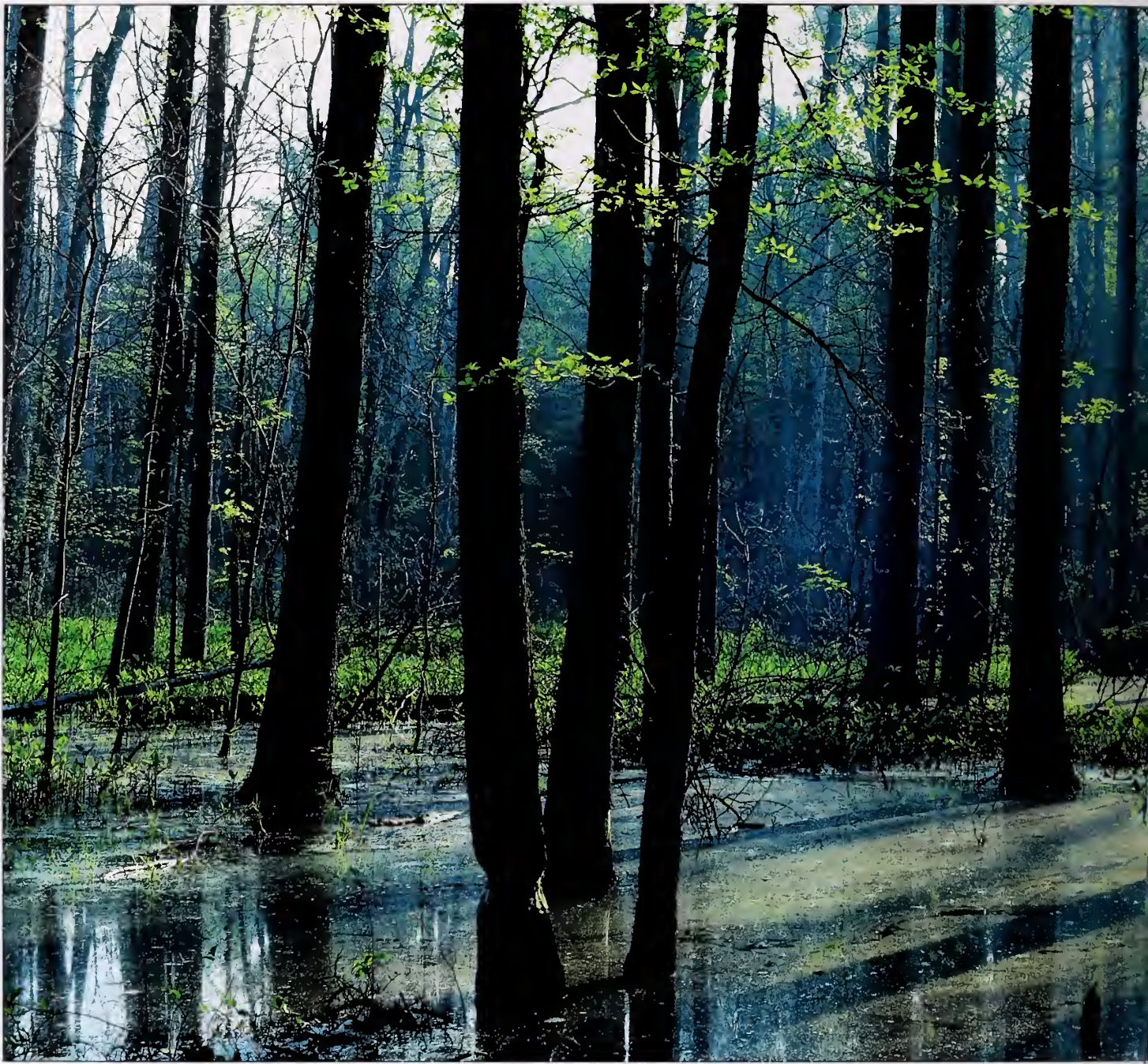
As a member of the Canid or dog family, the red fox seems to derive benefit from periodic ingestion of grass, possibly to improve digestion. This is common in domestic dogs also, and most likely offers bulk to a diet that can be fairly void of it.

Fecundity or birth rate in red foxes is affected by food supply, predators such as dogs, coyotes and man, plus population density, disease and available denning sites. These statistics aside, the pups are very much like others of the dog family and even humans; they learn through play and by observing adults.

1988-89. The statewide trapping season runs from November 15 through January 31 except in a few northern piedmont counties. Other hunting and chasing regulations exist.

The red fox is an efficient predator of mice and voles in the farmer's field; he provides recreation for the horse and hound chase; and he yields a valuable fur resource. The red fox fills a useful niche in the biota of the Commonwealth, and is but one piece of our wildlife legacy. □

Dennis Martin is the Game Department's bear/furbearer biologist.



# The Case for a Swamp

*Swamps, marshes, wetlands—they've never been loved like the mountains or the sea. But, today we are realizing what treasures we will lose if we don't fight to keep them.*



photo by Fred Siskind

by Steve Ausband

**W**hat is a wetland? That depends on your perspective. To many people, and for too long, a wetland has been simply a useless swamp, a haven for insects, a nuisance to farmers and foresters, and an opportunity for real estate developers. It has been a place in need of improvement—through draining, filling, cultivation, or even paving. It has been a place presenting problems for people making highways and for people wanting to grow more crops or build more homes. Virginia, after all, is on the move; more people and more industry require more land, more water, more food, more housing. These are very real problems. Who needs a swamp that just seems in the way?

We do. Wildlife does. Anyone interested in the quality of life in Virginia does. People with little real interest in wildlife or the outdoors need to realize the long-term importance of the state's wetlands. As Harry Gillam, retired Game Department Education Division Chief, pointed out recently in *The Federation Record*, wetlands are natural biological filters, removing sediments and impurities from the water. They also act as stormwater storage areas, holding back the flow of floodwater and releasing it more slowly, reducing downstream flooding. Wetlands help accumulate groundwater by holding runoff until it can filter down into the groundwater systems.

In a letter to Richard Burton, Executive Director of the Virginia Water Control Board, Jean G. Watts, a staff scientist for the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, points out that wetlands are often the last recipients of potentially harmful urban and agricultural runoff before it enters our waterways and groundwater systems. Such wetland barriers "can remove sediments, organic and inor-

ganic nutrients, and toxic materials from water that flows across them." Furthermore, wetlands provide homes, feeding areas, and cover for a wide variety of wildlife, some of which can live nowhere else.

In past years, coastal wetlands, especially tidal marshes, have received quite a bit of news coverage, and many states—among them our own—have enacted fairly stringent regulations governing the use and management of these valuable areas. More recently, non-tidal, freshwater wetlands have come to be viewed with increasing seriousness as valuable resources. (A good starting point for readers interested in recent developments along these lines is the *Virginia Nontidal Wetlands Roundtable Report to the Governor and the General Assembly of Virginia*, House Document No. 54, Richmond, 1990.) Although many of the areas are small—a beaver swamp here, a low-lying section along a river's flood plain there—the total accumulation is quite sizeable. Current estimates of the amount of non-tidal wetlands in Virginia run to about 808,000 acres. The problem is, we are in danger of losing a lot of it very quickly.

It would be nice if there were a single villain, the way there is in the movies—some arrogant, high-handed wheeler-dealer who thumbs his nose at ecology and the common good in the interest of making a quick buck. Life isn't like that, which is why people go to the movies. If there is a single culprit, it isn't a person but a tendency: the human tendency to look for the easiest answers to hard questions. For instance, the problem of burgeoning population in the Virginia Beach-Chesapeake area demands (among other things) better transportation facilities. There is a need for a new highway, a very large, eight-lane expressway connecting I-64 in Chesapeake with Route 44 in Virginia Beach. That would solve an immediate problem, but it would also destroy between 314 and 525 acres of valuable wetlands, according to the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

An easy answer to that problem is to replace the lost wetlands with other, newly-created wetlands, so there is "no net loss" of the resource. Unfortunately, while replacing 500 or so acres with another tract the same size might not present an insurmountable problem, replacing the *quality* of the resource might. The threatened area is of immense value to wildlife, consisting of bottomland hardwoods, mixed mesic hardwoods and pine stands, tidal wetlands, and open-water wetlands. Its values include flood control, groundwater discharge, sediment restoration, and wildlife habitat. You don't just create a 500-acre cattail marsh and make an even trade for a resource like that, and growing a stand of bottomland hardwoods is not something we can do overnight!

The problem of supplying power for industry and homes in a state with a growing population demands the creation of new generating plants. The proposed new "cogeneration" steam plants are designed to return some of the water they use to the rivers from which it comes. However, a substantial part of the water is *not* returned, and if enough plants are installed along enough rivers, the immediate effect is to lower the water level in the river. A lower water level means a smaller flood plain, which means a loss of valuable wetlands. Just recently, as many as five cogeneration plants have been proposed for the Staunton River between Leesville Dam and Kerr Reservoir. Each would return to the river some of the water it used—about 25 to 35 percent; the rest would turn to steam. Five fully operational plants, even under the best of conditions, would make the maze of wetlands at the upper end of Kerr Reservoir several million gallons drier every day.

But that's a drop in the bucket—or out of the river. The proposed water pipeline from Lake Gaston to Virginia Beach, which would be a fairly simple solution to the problem of that city's threatened water shortage, would take from the lake 60 million gallons of water each day. The Elm Hill Wildlife Management Area,



*Above: One of the many benefits of wetlands is that they provide homes, feeding areas, and cover for countless*

*species of wildlife, including the yellow-crowned night heron which breeds in Virginia wetlands; photo by Fred Siskind.*



*Below: Raccoons spend plenty of time in wetlands, as evidenced by the tell-tale tracks they leave behind; photo by Steve Ausband.*

winter home to thousands of waterfowl, covers the reservoir and surrounding wetlands at the western end of the lake. Gaston itself is fed by the huge Kerr Reservoir. Many of the tributary areas of Kerr Lake, especially near the upper end, where the Staunton and Dan Rivers feed into it, are broad, marshy flats threaded by mazes of shallow creeks and dotted with beaver ponds. According to Dr. Edward Fisher, who has studied the area as a part of his work on the state's non-tidal wetlands, no environmental impact study or impact statement has yet been made about the effect of sucking away 60 million gallons of water a day. Local environmentalists are alarmed, and some sportsmen's groups are outraged; but the legality of the pipeline is still being decided in the courts. It is, after all, a fairly simple solution to the problems of a growing city, and Kerr and Gaston Reservoirs are a long way from the centers of power in Virginia. Enough people will have to care very much about wetlands in order to make a difference.

I took a trip up the Dan and Staunton Rivers from Kerr Reservoir a few weeks ago, partly for old times' sake and partly out of curiosity—to wonder idly what dropping the water level by 60 million gallons a day would do to all that lovely wildness. Maybe nobody knows yet exactly what would happen, or how much of it would just dry up. I didn't want to think too much about that; I wanted to look at it in the summer and remember all the times I had seen it in other seasons.

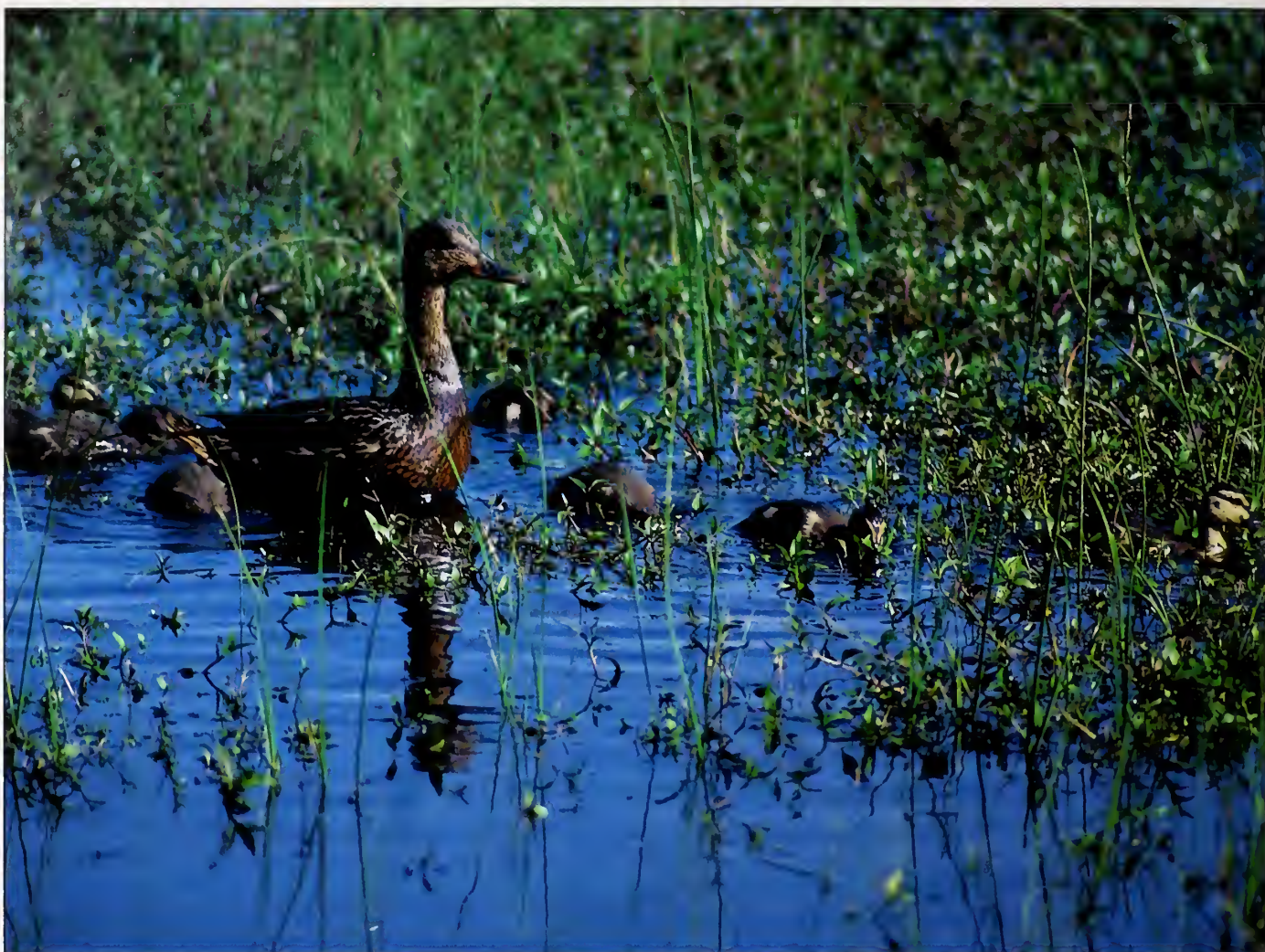
The water was low in July, low enough so that we could see low islands where there were usually shallows and mudflats. It gave an interesting perspective on things, affording in intimate look at the function of wetlands as a wildlife resource. There were tracks everywhere—beaver, raccoon, opossum, deer. We saw great blue herons, green herons, and dazzlingly white egrets. We ran aground near a broad spot in the Hyco River where I saw the first bald eagle I had seen at the lake several years ago. I have seen more eagles since then,

most of them near the confluence of the Dan and the Hyco, a couple more on the Staunton, near the State Park, and one in a cove near Buffalo Landing. Thinking about the eagles started me remembering some of the other things I had seen in this vast wetland.

We passed by the point where my son and I, along with Richard Rowland, got our limits of ducks one December afternoon and then sat, guns in their cases, and watched ducks land in the decoys until nightfall. Just before dark there were more flights of birds in the sky than we could count, and we sat open-mouthed and watched them pour in circles and eddies and swirls, like paint being poured onto a canvas, into the coves and out onto the main lake from the miles of swamps to our west and north.

A little further up was where I saw the albino deer, a doe, wade and swim across a half mile of channels and semi-solid land and disappear into woods so thick that even a snow-white deer could not be seen very long. And right up there was where we saw the 11 deer standing in the shallow water, while the dogs ran in circles further back in the swamp and never even came close to them; and on this island twice I have seen foxes walking by the water's edge. A mile or so up the Dan, I once floated silently by a pile of drift, and there was a big otter sitting on it, grooming himself like a cat. He stopped and watched me when I was 20 feet away, then went back to his grooming.

It's farming country. Even way up the Dan, or along the Staunton a couple of miles above the park, where it looks and feels too wild and remote to be just a little way from Clarksville or South Boston, you can sometimes hear tractors or the sound of someone cutting wood with a chainsaw. Busy highways like 58 and 15 cross arms of the lake or run parallel to the shoreline, but separating the farms and the highways from the wildlife is a maze of beaver swamps, willow trees, head-high grasses, marshy creeks, and low islands. It's worthless land, by some ways of reckoning. It can't be farmed, it can't even be



*Waterfowl need wetlands, and with their declining numbers, now more than ever, ducks like this mallard and her young need good wet habitat to survive; photo by Fred Siskind.*

walked through most of the time, it's under water part of the year, and you certainly can't build houses on it. But, as the non-tidal wetlands studies are showing, it has other valuable functions, and the foxes and the deer and the eagles and the ducks certainly seem to make the most of it in its present state. The wetlands make a barrier on both sides of the rivers, separating the world of asphalt and chemical pollutants and farms and housing developments and septic systems from the world at which I was looking.

The barrier is thin and fragile. Even when it stretches for miles, as it does in the twisting labyrinth of

beaver swamps and low grounds from Wolf Trap Creek down the Bannister River to the Dan, or above the Staunton River State Park, it is a delicate thing. Enough low water, and the willows will give way to higher-ground vegetation, the ground will dry out, and the area will be accessible, habitable. It can be drained, cut over, disced up, subdivided, sold off. Improved.

I took a long look around this summer, and I hoped everything would stay the same. I had fished here, hunted here, watched a lot of sunrises and sunsets, poked around in these swamps and willow flats, watched eagles and turkeys and deer

and otters, and I had just assumed—too easily, I guess—that it was all somehow permanent, that nothing would threaten it in my lifetime. That was foolish. Now I know it could dry up and disappear. Could? I think it probably will, if people are willing to settle for easy answers to hard questions. It will take a lot of work to preserve this place, and to keep other areas like it in Virginia. It will take a lot of people who understand what wetlands are, and who care very much about saving them. □

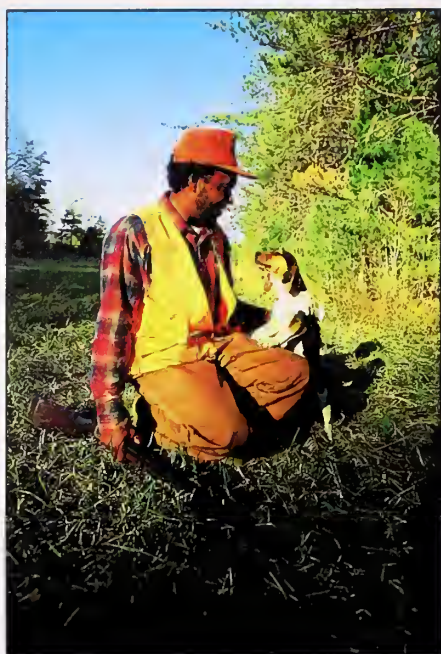
*Steve Ausband is the chairman of the English Department of Averett College in Danville, and is a frequent contributor to Virginia Wildlife.*



*photo by Maslowski*

# A Beagle Ballad

by Bob Gooch



Charlie Burruss with a hunting friend; photo by Lynda Richardson.

This ode to beagles and their music takes a first-hand look at what makes rabbit hunting a sport you can't ever get enough of.

American folklore is full of stories about the rabbit and the fox, but on this day it was the rabbit scampering away ahead of a pack of busy little beagle hounds that would provide us with stories to remember.

Charlie Burruss, his son Chad, and hunting partner Aubrey Poindexter had just put down their pack of pint-sized beagles, and the hunt was underway.

Chad, a Louisa County High School basketball and football player, waded bravely into a tangle of briars and honeysuckle, kicked a couple of times, and a nervous cottontail bounded from the thicket.

"Yup, yup, yup!" yelled Chad turning in the direction of a sniffing beagle. I got a glimpse of a ball of white cotton racing through a field of straggly broomsedge toward a farm pond. No chance for a shot. Not that I would have taken it. Cottontail hunters rarely shoot a rabbit on the jump. To do so deprives them of the joy of the chase.

The excitement in Chad's voice was obviously contagious. The tiny hound quickly picked up the trail and sounded off as his little companions raced to join him.

"He'll circle back and probably come in from our rear," someone shouted.

"Fast beginning!" I yelled enthusiastically as I ran to take a stand along the likely return route.

The race headed down the hill and across the tiny stream below the pond, with a chorus of bawls, howls, squeals, yips, or whatever you want to call them. Hound music, a melody of beagle voices signaling the happy pursuit of a favorite quarry. Beagle music is pure joy to the ears of a rabbit hunter, the very heart of the hunt. It's music the President's Own Band can't duplicate. Nor is one chase a duplicate of another. One particular melody would fill the winter air with its rapture, and then die with the end of the chase. You listen



and enjoy it while it lasts, and then hope for another—not the same, but hopefully one that rings with sweet beagle music promising an early shot at a bouncing cottontail. Even if the shot doesn't come, the hunt is already successful.

That was the story of our first chase. The bedlam raced up the hill beyond the pond, through a stand of young pines and into a hardwood forest. We waited—spread out on stands to intercept the cottontail. That's the strategy of beagling. The little hounds rarely catch up with a fleet cottontail, but they push it on a wide circle and the rabbit eventually turns back toward the spot from which it was jumped—and to the waiting hunters. At least the most successful cases work that way.



*Left to right: Charlie Burruss, Aubrey Poindexter and Chad Burruss kick through some broomsedge hoping to jump a rabbit so their beagles can begin the chase; photo by Lynda Richardson.*

For a variety of reasons the quarry doesn't always return to its home base, which is often a patch of thick honeysuckle or a thicket of impossible briars.

"Hope he doesn't hole up," said Aubrey Poindexter who waited on a stand next to me. Charlie Burruss had taken off after the dogs when the chase slowed down, and sporadic beagle talk indicated it might be over. Whether that rabbit took refuge in a woodchuck hole or simply evaded the dogs we didn't learn, but one by one the little hounds drifted back.

"What about that stand of young pines?" asked Poindexter.

That stand of young pines was thick, too thick, but we led the hounds in anyway to test the hunting. Immediately they had another bunny

going. It bounded by Charlie, but he couldn't get off a shot. "Too thick in here to shoot even if we jump one," he said.

That chase ended almost as soon as it began.

"I like that old roadbed on the other side of the house," said Poindexter. "Noticed it when we drove in." Abandoned roadbeds offer good cover for all kinds of wildlife—edges, honeysuckle, shrubs—natural vegetation that is usually neglected. It's not the kind of land that can be effectively cultivated.

"What about the dogs? We'll be hunting beside a busy public road." The old roadbed ran alongside that new one.

The hunters shook their heads. "We have to take that kind of risk all

the time. We lose a dog once in awhile, but not often."

It was then that the foxes, three of them, entered the picture.

Chad Burruss had jumped that first rabbit, and one of the beagles the second one. Obviously there was a jump dog or two in that pack of little beagles. Hunters who own good jump dogs are blessed. Good trail hounds are much easier to come by, and for that reason seasoned rabbit hunters are accustomed to doing a lot of the hunting themselves. They kick likely clumps of vegetation, jump on brush piles, and wade into brier patches and honeysuckle. There's no more appropriate piece of hunting clothing than a pair of bird hunter's chaps or brush pants. Hunt in thin jeans and your legs will be covered with scratches before the day is up, and your jeans will be ribboned.

Hunters get into the action irrespective of how many jump dogs they own, however, and it was in that spirit that Charlie Burruss waded into the honeysuckle along one bank of the old road and Aubrey Poindexter took the brier-infested middle. Chad disappeared in the thicket on the far bank.

Action developed almost immediately as one of the hounds hit a trail just in front of Poindexter. My spirits rose—and then took a plunge.

"Fox!" called Poindexter.

Even as he spoke I noticed a gray animal slinking away on the far bank. At first I thought it was a house cat, but then Aubrey's warning identified it.

"There's the den. Might as well get out of here."

The cottontail is a favorite prey of both the gray and red fox but it was a

family of grays that had taken up residence in the old road.

On Poindexter's advice we pulled the hounds out of the old road and crossed the main road to look for more promising territory. I could see the wisdom of our move, but then I began to wonder. I don't doubt that a den of foxes can clean the immediate area of rabbits, but on the other hand a good population of rabbits *could* have been the reason the fox family moved in. Had the predators eliminated the entire cottontail population? Or were there rabbits still there?

We didn't wait to find out.

In the meantime, three of the beagles were off on a fast chase in futile pursuit of the fox. No chance they would catch it—or even press it. There *was* the possibility the fox would double back as rabbits are accustomed to doing. We weren't particularly interested in shooting the fox, however, even though the season on them was still open.

"They'll give up and come back," noted Charlie Burruss as we pushed on. Rabbit hunters spend a lot of time searching for lost dogs. "Part of the game," said Burruss.

A fresh cutover beckoned. It wasn't large, but it was full of briers, honeysuckle and laps, and brown broom-sedge shot up in patches here and there. It fairly yelled rabbits.

One of the beagles hit something even as we entered the cutover. The remainder of the now reduced pack joined in the chase and hound music once again pierced the thin winter air. A rabbit for sure this time! The chase rolled deeply into a stand of mature pines and the music of the hounds faded—grew dim. But then it got stronger.

"They're turning!" someone called, and we scrambled for positions along the likely return route.

A fast rabbit will run well ahead of the slower beagles, and it may appear long before the hunter expects it. Smart hunters begin sweeping the countryside with their eyes even as the case turns homeward. Alert now, grips tightening on our shotguns, we waited—expectantly.

Boommm . . .

The echoes of a scattergun faded



*Above:* Rabbit beagles "singing" on the run bring all the excitement to rabbit hunting; photo by Lynda Richardson. *Above right:* Cottontails are crafty game animals, often outwitting beagles on their trail by circling back around to the point at which they were jumped—and safety; photo by Gary Meszaros. *Left:* The author, dressed in the typical briar-proof rabbit hunting attire, waits to intersect a rabbit circling back around in front of the beagles; photo by Lynda Richardson.



and we waited expectantly for the announcement that a rabbit was in the bag. But it didn't come.

"Another fox," moaned Poindexter. "Almost too far away to shoot, but it got suspicious and turned."

Eventually the little hounds gave up again and wandered back.

Another fox! Obviously we were hunting the wrong area, even though we'd jumped a couple of rabbits and seen droppings.

When the cottontail populations are strong they can survive predation by foxes and other varmints. The little critters are so prolific they seem to stay several litters ahead. Yes, rabbits have made a strong comeback after all but disappearing from the Virginia hunting scene back in the 1970s. Today it's not a return to the old days by any means. In many parts of the Old Dominion you still can't walk



along a cow trail at dusk with the almost certain chance of jumping a rabbit or two. Nor do you see as many of them hopping along the edges at the end of a long summer day.

But all of this is not the result of a scarcity. Rabbits are also smarter, adjusting to pressure and the times. They seem to have adopted ruffed grouse tactics, sitting quietly in their forms unless almost stepped on. Walk rapidly by a cottontail and it will freeze, but pause near it and it will flush just as does the grouse. That's why good jump dogs are so important to the modern rabbit hunter.

There's still good cottontail hunting in Virginia, much better than it was a few years ago—and it could get better. But more rabbits doesn't necessarily translate to fuller game bags. Today only those hunters who own good packs of little beagles score consistently. And they work at hunting, getting into rough cover along with their dogs and kicking the game out.

"This used to be good rabbit country," I said to Charlie Burruss as we worked through a stand of mature pines.

"Not likely to be much today unless the weather is real cold," was his reply.

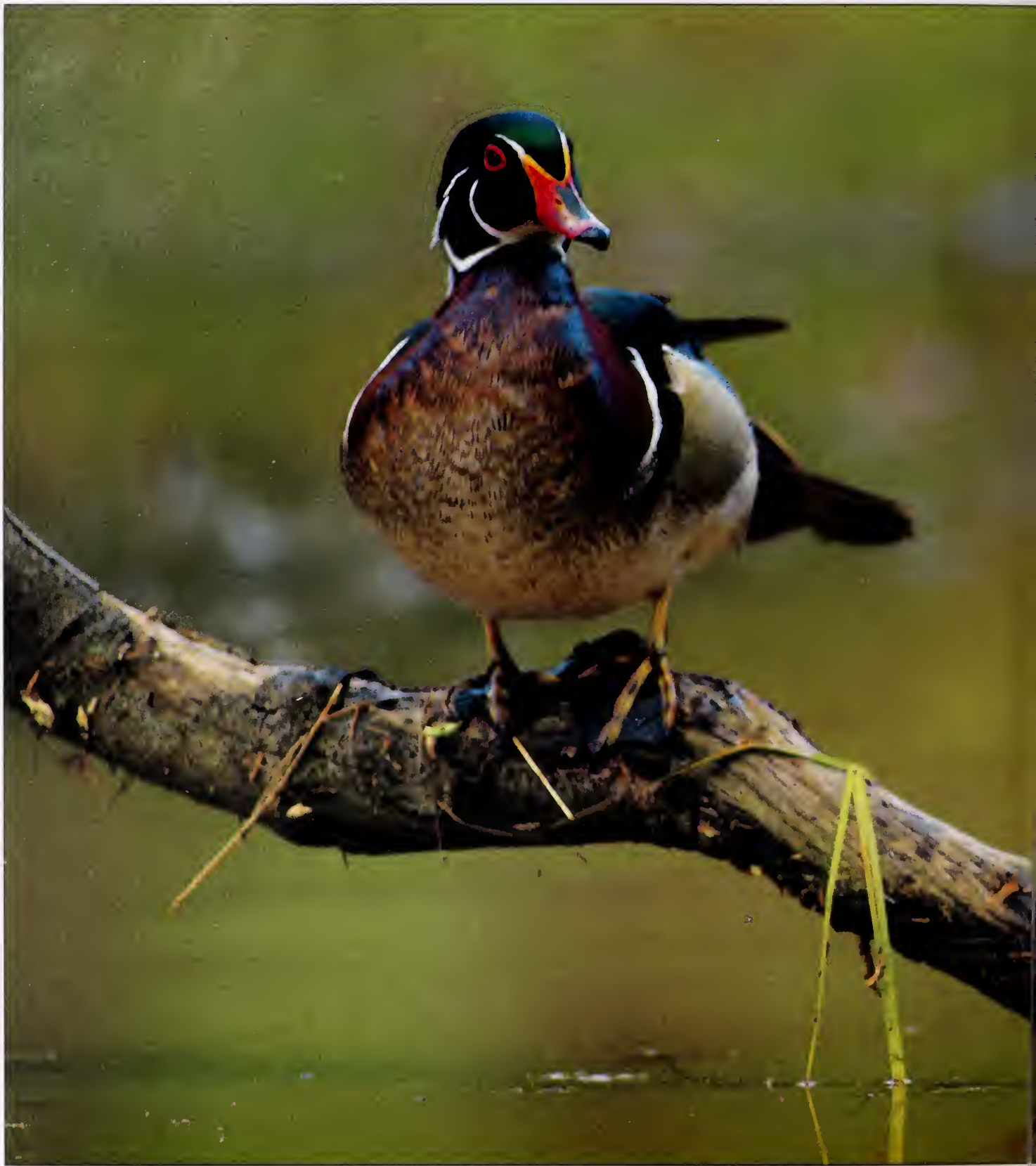
I got the same response as we followed the beagles through a field of waving broomsedge, once a prime place to hunt old bro' rabbit. "You could follow its route by the action of the broomsedge even if you couldn't see it," I said. Burruss grinned knowingly and shook his head. Cottontails adjust with the times.

The cottontail rabbit is not a wilderness animal. It has had to adjust to the loss of much of its favorite environment, an agricultural community of small farms and hedgerows. This has had an impact on its numbers just as it has affected the bobwhite quail. "Spotty" is the adjective most often used in describing the rabbit hunting prospects in Virginia.

Rabbit hunting may never again be like it was in the 1960s and prior years, but those who know their game, keep abreast of its habits, own good beagles, and are willing to work at their favorite kind of hunting enjoy rewarding success.

The Saturday following our hunt, Aubrey Poindexter, Charlie Burruss and his son Chad went to Augusta County and all three got their limits—that means they brought home six cottontails apiece—18 in all. □

*Bob Gooch is an outdoor newspaper columnist and author of several books on hunting and fishing. He lives in Troy, near Charlottesville.*



Wood ducks are one of the many waterfowl species getting a helping hand from landowners, sportsmen's groups, and conservationists.

# A Puzzle of Ducks

*Waterfowl across North America have suffered a terrible decline, and the North American Waterfowl Management Plan is coming to the rescue. But, good intentions aside, how do you save a duck?*



agencies involved in NAWMP: photo by Gary W. Carter.

*"Ducks are no longer free."*

—Harvey K. Nelson  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

by Virginia Shepherd

Ducks are in trouble in North America. We all know that. We've read the headlines about wetlands loss, about plummeting populations of black ducks, mallards, teal, and canvasbacks. We've shaken our heads at reductions in bag limits and we've gloomily listened to reports of extended drought, the draining of wetlands and the destruction of good nesting cover by overzealous farmers.

With the birth of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) in 1986, however, waterfowl on this continent has a fighting chance. With the cooperation of sportsmen's organizations, conservation groups, landowners, and government agencies, NAWMP is working toward a simple goal: to restore duck populations from their present dan-

But, though the program identifies the problem and the solution, it doesn't tell you what good habitat is, or where it was originally, or how to restore it to bring waterfowl back. That dilemma is being solved by people pooling together their knowledge, their experience and their imagination to get the job done.

Here in Virginia, for instance, as part of the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture, we're concerned about protecting and managing priority wetland habitats for migrating and wintering species of waterfowl, and we have identified over 60,000 acres as priority areas. Still, protecting a marsh is one thing, bringing back waterfowl to an area is another.

Pete Trexler, the manager of James River Corporation's 1,800-acre Upper Brandon plantation on the James River can tell you that. For the past six years, in an effort to provide

marsh, with people in it all the time. I realized that we weren't providing any safe resting areas in the marsh for the birds."

So, what did Trexler do? The obvious: he kept people out.

"Today we don't allow anyone in the marsh after October 1." He also built observation platforms and boardwalks into the marsh to lessen the human disturbance and still provide viewing.

And he still hunts the marsh. How's that? Well, Trexler realizes that you can't hunt a refuge area and expect the birds to still call it a resting place, so he protects an area 1,000 yards in diameter on each side of the blinds, restricts hunting to the waterfowl feeding areas only, and limits the hunts to a maximum of three half-days per week.

The knowledge of the needs of the waterfowl in the marsh adjoining the



gerously low levels to an average continental duck breeding population of 62 million birds and a fall flight of 100 million, by protecting and restoring some 5.5 million acres of prime habitat—at a cost of at least \$1.5 billion.

Obviously a task too big for any governmental body alone, the plan has organized into regional Joint Venture programs relying on dedicated cooperation to pull off the challenge.

waterfowl hunting opportunities for its clients, James River Corporation has made it Pete Trexler's job to develop what has become the premier model of waterfowl management in the state.

"The biggest problem I saw in the 450-acre marsh when I came here," said Trexler, waving over an expanse of reeds and James River backwater bordering the farm, "was that it was disturbed too much. There was always something going on in the

*Restoring and improving wintering habitat for migratory waterfowl is the main focus of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan's Atlantic Coast Joint Venture program. Committed landowners have proven that through careful management it is possible to provide a wintering refuge for species such as Canada geese on their property, and enjoy splendid hunting opportunities at the same time; photo by Gary Meszaros.*



*Blue-winged teal are just one of the species that will profit from an increase in prime nesting and brood-rearing habitat in the prairie pothole country; photo by Bill Lea.*

farm has paid off. Today, some 5,000 mallards alone spend the winter in the refuge, along with green-winged teal, pintails, wigeon, shovelers, and ring-necked ducks. With the help of Ducks Unlimited and the guidance of Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries Biologist Don Schwab, Trexler and his staff also have set up over 50 wood duck nesting boxes on Upper Brandon. In 1988 they recorded a 98 percent occupancy rate and 124 ducks successfully hatched out of the boxes.

Still, a duck is not simply a duck, and each species has its own quirks along with specific wintering habitat needs. Thus, what pleases a wood duck may not please a Canada goose, and Trexler makes that point clear to those hoping to implement some waterfowl management strategies on their own land.

For example, when Trexler first began goose management on Upper Brandon, he spent a great deal of time working with the Soil Conservation Service creating specifications for ponds which would be suitable for wild Canada geese. "Everyone had a

fish pond mentality," he said. "And the two most important things that geese need from a pond are a 10-1 slope and a water depth no greater than 18".

Today, Trexler is justly proud of his ponds where the geese "hardly know they're making a transition from water up to grazing." He has also fine-tuned a planting schedule of winter wheat and Japanese millet along with the draining and flooding of his ponds at precise times to accommodate the different needs of breeding ducks in the spring and hungry geese in the winter.

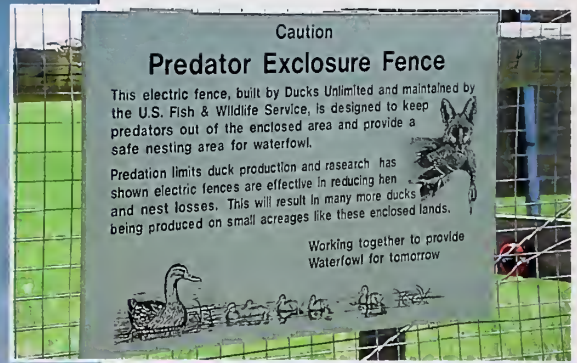
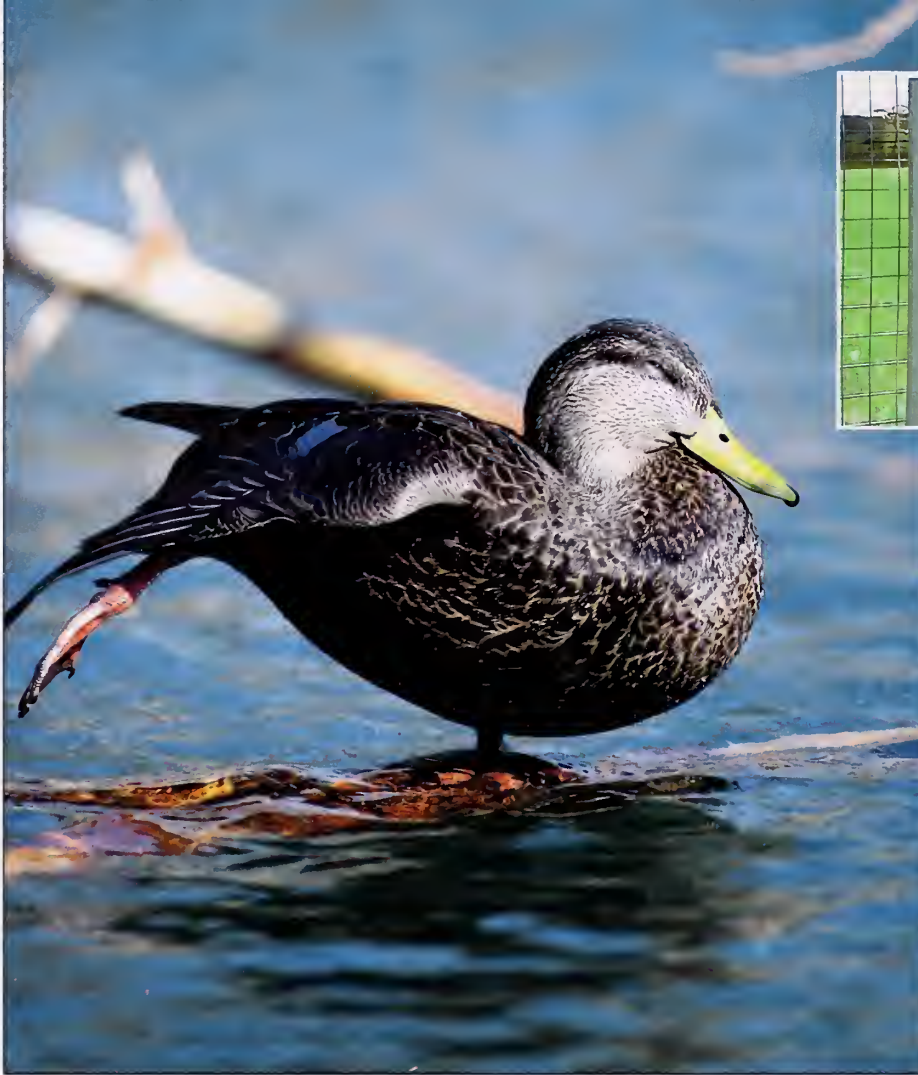
From an area that witnessed virtually no wintering resident Canada geese six years ago, Trexler has counted up to 15,000 geese on Upper Brandon at one time, and averages about 6,000 birds during the winter. Still, even today Trexler treats the geese that seek refuge on Upper Brandon very, very carefully. "We hunt Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays," says Trexler. "For half a day only."

Why such light hunting on the flock that averages in the thousands?

Says Trexler, "In 10 minutes you can ruin five years worth of work in bringing geese back to your farm. Literally." He once saw 3,000 newly-arrived migrating geese get up and leave for good after being spooked by a well-meaning couple simply walking down a dirt road on the farm which adjoined the fields where the geese were feeding. The couple didn't wave, whistle or fire a gun. They simply walked. And the geese didn't like it. "They hate 5-wheelers, too," Trexler warns.

But, if waterfowl must be managed with kid gloves on their winter resting areas here in Virginia to bring their numbers back, how must they be managed on their nesting grounds thousands of miles away?

That's not an easy answer, but lots of people are working together with one another to find out. Last spring, Ducks Unlimited conducted a tour of the prairie pothole country in North Dakota to educate some folks on what this "brain trust" of federal, state, and private biologists, engineers, and farming experts have figured out when it comes to prairie



*Left: The improvement of quality habitat is crucial to the recovery of the black duck, which is a major focus of the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture's restoration efforts; photo by Rob Simpson. Above: In the prairie pothole country of North Dakota, predation on eggs and nesting hens is one of the factors which has pushed nesting success rates to a dangerous low. While effort is being made to provide more suitable nesting cover for waterfowl to reduce the effect of predation, Ducks Unlimited, and federal and state agencies are helping the dwindling numbers of nesting birds by constructing predator-free nesting areas; photo by Virginia Shepherd.*

breeding and nesting waterfowl.

First, let me tell you that for a Southerner used to marshes of cat-tails and permanent water, the sight of North Dakota's flat land covered by short grass and dotted with shallow dry depressions is a shock. Where do the ducks nest? Where do they find cover in that barren land? Well, it turns out that all is not as meets the eye.

It turns out that for ducks to find the pothole country hospitable for nesting and rearing young, they need to have at least three types of habitat. First, they need what's called "breeding pair habitat," which in simple terms means they require a little privacy and a little water to cement their pair bonds. This means there must be plenty of water around from April

through early May so that every pair of ducks with courtship on their mind has the opportunity to establish a pair bond without being bothered. Without such a bond, there will be no breeding, no nesting, no young. But, the pairs only need this abundance of water for a few weeks. So, though the casual observer may look at a dried-up pond in June with dismay, if the pond was filled in April and early May, it served its purpose for breeding ducks.

Come May, ducks are looking to nest. Now, here's another strange truth for the uninformed. Nesting habitat can be as much as 1½ miles away from water. Once hatched, the hen will force-march her tiny ducklings to good wetland areas full of invertebrates for brooding, but pre-

mier nesting habitat in North Dakota means large blocks of grassland.

Finally, the newly-hatched broods need to grow up. So, it's back to the wetlands, what biologists call "semi-permanent wetlands," which are shallow enough to have plenty of invertebrates, yet permanent enough to last throughout the summer.

So, what's the problem? Why don't we have any nesting ducks? Mike Johnson, Migratory Game Bird Management Supervisor for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department says that although many people believe the problem is drought, the problem really can't be blamed solely on that.

"It's no secret that things are dry," says Johnson, explaining that the state is now in its third year of

drought. "But it's important to remember that drought is a natural part of the prairie. That's why we have prairie, that's why these wetlands are so productive.

"It's really not a big deal for ducks to sit out a couple of years of drought," he explained. "But when you have drought on top of massive habitat loss, both wetland and upland habitat loss like we've had here, then it gets to be a real problem."

A major reason for habitat loss is that farmers in North Dakota, like everywhere else, had started to farm marginal land which also happened to be prime nesting cover for the No. 1 duck-producing state in the Union. Fortunately, however, the five-year-old federal Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) has signed up over 3 million acres of land to be left fallow or in pasture, and Johnson believes that's good news for ducks.

"If we had water, I think we would be in pretty good shape right now," he said. "We have now what we've been looking for: massive blocks of upland nesting cover."

In addition, Ducks Unlimited, with its regional office of biologists and engineers in Bismarck, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have been working with landowners to recreate potholes which have been transformed into marginal farming land. With the help of ditch plugs, these groups are making sure that when the water does come, it won't drain away.

But, there is one other sticky problem in North Dakota right now; it's a mammalian predator problem that's threatening an already weak waterfowl population. Red foxes, skunks, raccoons and badgers primarily, have been taking a toll on North Dakota's nesting hens—even in good cover.

Although it's hard to believe, biologists have found that a nest success rate of about 15 percent will maintain a mallard population over the

increased farming, predators have lost the prey base they once had, and are turning to the easy and vulnerable nesting ducks. Another is that with the shrinking of good wildlife habitat, predatory and prey activity has become concentrated in the suitable areas left. These areas also happen to be the last of the good waterfowl nesting sites, leaving hens literal sitting ducks to predation. With the price of fur down, North Dakota is finding it difficult to control its foxes and other mammalian

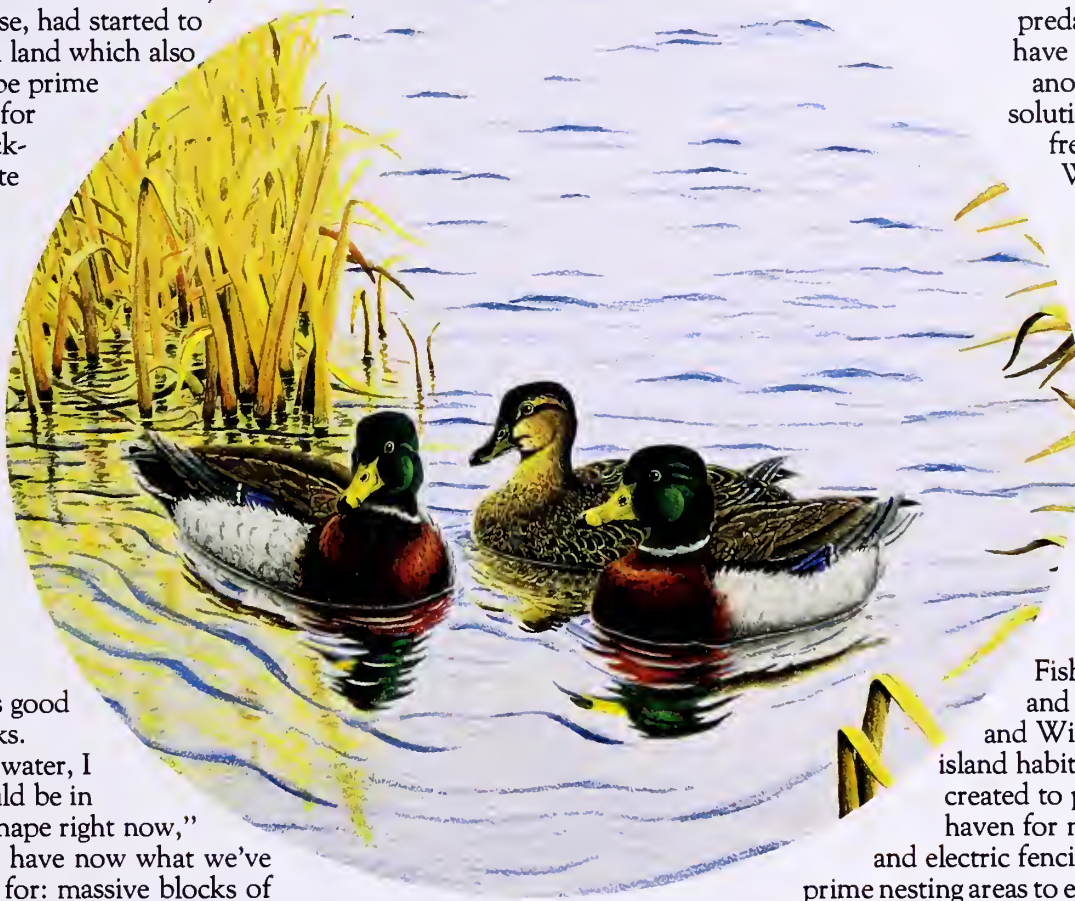
predators, so they have elected to try another stop-gap solution: predator-free enclosures.

With financial help and engineering expertise from Ducks Unlimited, the goodwill of private landowners, and the management of the North Dakota Game and

Fish Department and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, island habitats have been created to provide a safe haven for nesting ducks,

and electric fencing erected on prime nesting areas to exclude predators. Both efforts, although expensive and impractical as long-range solutions to the waterfowl crisis, are buying time for declining populations and providing valuable information for all those who are pulling for and working toward the restoration of waterfowl.

There's no doubt about it—things are happening for the good of ducks these days, and it's those who love waterfowl the most who are making it happen. □



*illustration by Thomas E. Phelps*

long term. But, in North Dakota, the signs are dismal, as one study recorded only an 8 percent nesting success rate on their study area, with 70 percent of nest destruction attributed to predation.

Still, one can't blame a red fox for trying to survive, and actually, experts blame the high nest predation rate on a couple of factors. One is that with



# Buy the Right Stuff

*Before you spend lots and lots of money  
on a flyfishing outfit that ends up forgotten  
in the closet, learn how to pick the right  
equipment for your needs.*

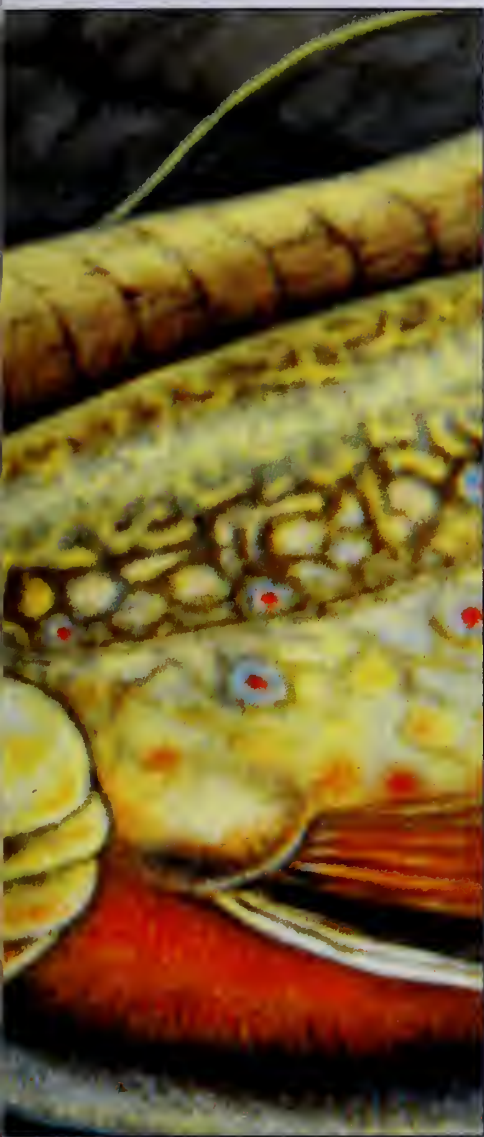


illustration by Dennis Burkhardt

by Harry Murray

Fly fishing is one of the most rewarding forms of angling in the Old Dominion. Part of the justification for its fascination lies in the fact that it is exceptionally productive and surprisingly easy, but many people are attracted to it because it is simply a tremendous amount of fun.

Obviously the enjoyment derived from fly fishing will depend to a certain extent upon one's success. This success will be governed by carefully selecting the appropriate tackle to match the specific fishing you plan to do. This point was driven home to me quite forcefully last fall, when upon arriving on a small mountain trout stream, I realized that in my haste to get away from home I had accidentally picked up my bass rod. Not having time to go home for my trout rod, I decided to see if I could get by with my bass rod. I got by, but that was about all, Oh, I took a few trout, but what should have been pleasure became work. My bass rod was too stiff and clumsy for that precise fishing, depriving me of the necessary delicacy and accuracy I needed to take the trout.

The best way to select the appropriate tackle for the type of fly fishing you plan to do is to first determine the size flies you plan to use. Obviously, if you plan to fish gnat-size flies for trout in low streams you will need different tackle than if you plan to throw hummingbird-size poppers for largemouth bass in lakes.

In order to simplify your tackle selection, let's assume most of your trout flies will be in the range of size 10 down to size 22 and that your bass flies will range from size two down to size eight.

Armed with this information, we can now select the appropriate fly line size. (This is exactly what I do with beginning anglers who come into my fly shop for help.)

Fly lines are assigned specific numbers from one up to 14 depending upon the weight of the first 30 feet of line exclusive of the front taper. The smaller the number, the lighter and finer the line, and the larger the number the heavier and thicker the line.

If you are interested primarily in trout fishing, the size flies you will be using can be cast efficiently on sizes two, three and four fly lines. Not only will these lines carry the small flies properly, but they will permit you to present them on the water gently. True, a size eight bass line could cast these little trout flies okay, but it would bomb them on the stream like watermelons. On the other hand, if your main interest is in bass, warm water species and salt-water fishing, a size eight line will cover the majority of your needs. Why not use the four weight trout line for large bass flies? Simply because the light line does not have enough mass to cast those large flies effectively.

If you are like many anglers just getting into fly fishing, you may not want to invest in separate trout and bass outfits, preferring to do both with the same outfit until you see if you like this game. Here I would suggest a size six line size. This will enable you to fish bass flies up to size six and trout flies down to size 14.

Only now that you realize the line size which will enable you to handle the flies you plan to use, can you intelligently select the appropriate fly rod. Altering this order is asking for frustration.

If your main goal is trout fishing in small mountain streams, a delicately tipped seven-and-a-half foot rod which will handle a two, three or four weight fly line is ideal. Rods which are much shorter than this require the angler to get closer to the pools in order to control the fly on the water,

hence the trout will be easily scared. Fly rods much over seven and a half feet long (with exception of several two weights) are constantly crashing into the overhanging tree limbs.

If bass in lakes and larger rivers are your game, a nine-foot rod which balances with an eight weight line would be a good choice. Most serious bass flyrodders like a rod with a strong tip and a moderately flexible butt section. The powerful tip enables us to handle the heavy under-water flies and the bulky floaters equally well. The flexible butt section of the rod blends well with the slow casting cycle dictated by our large wind-resistant flies and bugs.

If you want one fly rod which will enable you to sample both trout and bass fishing in Virginia I would suggest an eight-foot rod which handles a number six line. This rod will let you successfully fish the smaller bass and panfish flies. It will cast the larger trout flies efficiently at medium to long fishing distances; however, it will be a little too stiff for accurate fly placement and delicacy on small streams.

Fly lines come in four basic styles. Double tapered fly lines have moderately long middle sections (belly) with a short equal taper on each end. These lines are often used for trout fishing and provide you the economy of being able to reverse the line when one end wears out. Weight forward fly lines have a short front taper like the double tapered lines, but they have a short belly (usually about 30 feet long) after which they taper down quickly to a long finer diameter running line. The weight forward lines facilitate long casts due to their small running line. Another basic fly line Virginia anglers should consider is the bass bug tapered line. These are constructed along the same styles as the weight forward lines except the front tapers are shorter on the bass bug lines and the belly is concentrated more toward the forward portion of the line. These lines are preferred for fishing bass bugs and saltwater flies due to this concen-



*Before buying a flyfishing outfit, it's important to think about where you will be fishing most of the time. For example, if you'll be fishing small streams, you won't want a rod much over 7½ feet, and you'll want a light starting drag on your reel that will bring in the big ones instead of breaking them off; photos by Michael Simon.*



trated belly. Personally, I find them very helpful when fishing large under-water flies for bass since they minimize false casting. The level fly lines are the last style to consider. These lack the delicacy of fly presentation afforded with double tapered lines and the distance which can be achieved with weight forward and bass bug tapered lines. Their appeal is their lower price.

In addition to the various styles of tapers available in fly lines, they are

also manufactured in different densities. This enables us to choose lines that are high floaters or fast sinkers or from numerous densities in between. Yes, as you can imagine, by the time you mix all the various tapers and densities, you can come up with a great number of lines. Let's simplify this. I use double tapered floating fly lines for all of my trout fishing in Virginia. For my warm water fishing I use floating bass bug tapered lines most of the time, going to a high

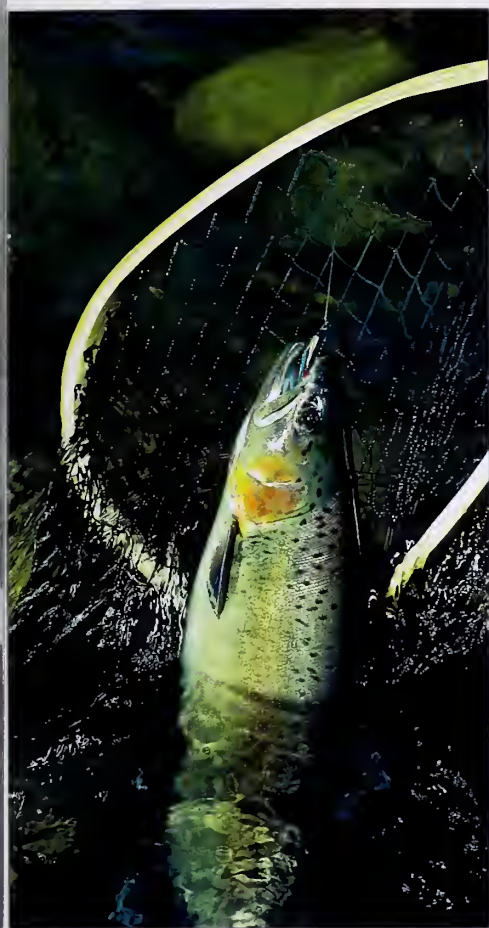


photo by Doug Stamm

density tip, weight forward line in spring high water levels and fall low water temperatures.

Fly line backing is advisable on all fly reels. The most popular style is 20-pound test dacron. The obvious advantage of backing is that it gives you a greater capacity to fight fish that are approaching the end of the fly line. Many strong, long running fish are almost impossible to stop with 90 feet of fly line. A second advantage which backing affords is filling the reel to a point that the fly line can be recovered much more quickly with each crank of the reel handle.

Fly reels are often shunted to the side by anglers as simply "a place to store the line." As with all theories, this is great as long as it works. But, what happens when that big trout you've been fishing for over the last

three years takes your small fly on a fine tippet and suddenly runs rapidly downstream? You'll find out the instant he has taken up all the slack line and attempts to run more line off your reel. If the reel does not have a light starting drag he will break off instantly. A second problem I've encountered on some of the fly reels which have appeared on the market in the past few years is the large tolerance permitted between the spool and the reel frame. When this occurs there is a potential for permitting the fly line to get in behind the spool. Not only is this very frustrating, it can practically destroy an expensive fly line in seconds. Fly reels for bass fishing should be of durable construction since we tend to beat them up more than our trout reels. If you are headed for fast running saltwater fish, you should consider a reel with a more elaborate drag system than found in most freshwater reels. Saltwater reels should hold at least two hundred yards of backing, whereas 100 feet is adequate for bass and trout in Virginia.

Leaders are extremely important for Virginia's fly angler. Considering these as only sections of monofilament between the fly line and the fly can be disastrous. Honestly, the incorrect leader can totally negate an otherwise properly selected and correctly balanced outfit. I see this happen dozens of times every year in my fly fishing schools.

Trout anglers, especially, should be very careful in selecting the correct leader, since on many of our small mountain streams we cast only the leader and a few feet of fly line.

Bass fly fishers are finding that by incorporating fluorescent materials and indicators into their leader they can greatly improve their catches on underwater flies.

My favorite leaders are constructed of compound knotted tapers from .021 inch diameter butt sections down to 0X to 7X tippets, depending upon the fly size. For example, a size 4 bass bug requires at least a 2X tippet, whereas a size 20 trout fly is most

productive with a leader tapered down to at least 6X. The most popular leaders are from seven and a half to 10 feet long, with the length being dictated by the wariness of the fish.

Since much of the fly fishing done in the Old Dominion is by wading, an understanding of the gear options available is also helpful.

Hip boots are fine for small mountain trout streams, but when heading for larger rivers chest high waders are definitely preferable. Within both of these lengths one can choose from the boot foot style which is complete as purchased or the stocking foot style which requires that a separate wading shoe be worn over them. The obvious advantage of the boot foot style is simplicity and ease of getting them on and off. The advantage of the stocking foot style is comfort and the ability to use only the wading shoes when wading in warm weather.

Many materials are currently being used in the construction of waders. Most of these are holding up well, but many anglers are finding the neoprene styles quite warm for our needs. Whichever style you choose, I would strongly recommend one which has felt soles. These will be slightly more expensive than the cleated sole styles, but I don't know how to put a price on a broken back incurred from slipping on wet rocks.

A fishing vest with numerous pockets is very helpful in fly fishing. If you already have the fly boxes you plan to use, it is wise to take them along to your fly shop when you plan to purchase a vest. If you plan to purchase the boxes and the vest at the same time, try the various boxes in the vest pockets to make sure they will fit properly. Some recent vests have a profusion of tiny pockets in which nothing seems to fit. Make sure your vest has a rear pocket large enough to carry a raincoat.

Yes, a raincoat is essential for comfort and even safety and the good health of anglers. Purchase a good raincoat and keep it in your vest unless you plan to be fishing close to your car. One bluebird day, I left



*Fishing a large trout streamer requires using a sturdier outfit than you would need to fish size 18-20 dry flies. For example, an 8-foot rod which balances with a six-weight double-tapered line would handle this streamer nicely; photo by Harry Murray.*

my raincoat in the car and hiked three miles up into a mountain stream. You guessed it, several hours later a rain materialized from nowhere, and I almost drowned. That was the last time I left my raincoat behind.

Polarized sunglasses may seem to be a relatively insignificant item in this arsenal of equipment, but I personally depend upon them so much that I carry two pairs in my vest in case one gets lost. They are valuable far beyond their often stated use of seeing fish. I rely on them to reduce the water surface glare to enable me to read the water, evaluate the bottom, see the line drift and detect strikes.

Numerous gadgets are well worth carrying in your vest, but keep in

mind that little by little these will increase the weight of your vest significantly. Pick the ones which will be of the greatest value for your specific style of fishing. Some to consider are hook sharpening flies, knot tying aids, leader straighteners, leader clippers, scissors, stream thermometers, small pliers for hook barb removal, fly disgorgers, forceps for removing flies from the fish's jaw, fly floatant, and fly sinking compounds.

If you are just getting into fly fishing, the abundance of different flies available can be very confusing. In order to simplify this, here is an assortment of 10 different flies which anglers in my fly fishing schools have found productive throughout Virginia. These include streamers, nymphs and top water patterns.

### Trout Flies

Crowe Beedle-sizes 14 to 20  
Elk Hair Caddis-sizes 12 to 18  
Mr. Rapidan Dry-sizes 12 to 18  
Red Squirrel Nymph-sizes 10 to 14  
Woolly Bugger-sizes 6 to 10

### Bass and Panfish Flies

Silver Outcast-sizes 4 & 6  
Shenk's White Streamer-sizes 4 & 6  
Murray's Hellgrammite-sizes 4 to 8  
Whitlock's Canary Bug-size 10  
Gallasch's Crawl 'N Twitch-size 4 & 8

Yes, fly fishing can add an exciting new dimension to your angling game, and the rewards will continue to grow as you delve deeper and deeper into it. □

*Harry Murray is a freelance writer who teaches fishing and fly tying in Edinburg, Virginia.*

photo by Roy Edwards



Game Warden of the Year Jerry Jones is honored for his recent achievement by Robert Gifford of the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

## 1990 Game Warden of the Year

Officer Jerry Jones of Warm Springs has been named Game Warden of the Year by the Virginia Wildlife Federation. A native of Clarke County and a graduate of Clarke County High School and Lord Fairfax Community College, Jones began his career with the Department in July of 1978 when he was assigned to Sussex County. In August, 1981, he was transferred to Bath County, which he covers in addition to Allegheny and Highland Counties.

In speaking of Jones' outstanding achievement and recent recognition, Major Lewis Brandt said, "Jerry's dedication to his Department and his commitment to the natural resource leads him to be one of the top employees in the enforcement field." □

## Letters

### Shared Feelings

I was so delighted to read your "Editor's Page," *Virginia Wildlife*, October 1990. I am a woman hunter,

who assumed that because I am a woman, I must explain my strange feelings about the death of a wild animal.

On my way to work in the pickup, with my husband following close behind in our family car, I slammed on my brakes to avoid one of Shenandoah County's many wild rabbits. Fortunately, neither the bunny nor my husband became a victim of our Ranger. I have cried more than once for a beautiful white-tailed deer that has been struck down by a passing vehicle. I too have let a deer pass . . . "just because." But early in the morning, just as the rising sun spreads its rosy glow on the mountainside and a young buck comes into sight; there is no hesitation.

I hope that I have acquired some of the "wild animal spirit" that you spoke of in your article and I assure you that a venison meal does not pass in our home without some mention of the day the deer was taken or how grateful we are to be able to hunt our food.

I realize that after speaking to some of my men friends that hunt, they also have the same feelings; no I am not alone.

Our family enjoys *Virginia Wildlife* very much, not only for the hunting information but for all the special articles and wonderful pictures, which have adorned many a school project. Thank you all for such a wonderful magazine.

Susan A. France  
Edinburg

My husband and I always have enjoyed your editorials in the magazine so very much. But since his death, your Nov. 1990 one I believe is the best I've ever read, and I just wanted to thank you for writing it, as it has brought back many happy memories of my husband and me hunting and fishing together. Thank you very much.

Alice W. Kean  
Mineral

### Happy Subscribers

I would like to take this opportunity to commend you on the outstanding job you are doing as editor of *Virginia Wildlife*. The articles cover a wide range of topics and are enjoyable, educational, and informative. You and your staff have done wonders to increase my personal awareness of the importance of conservation and good wildlife management.

Martin R. Griek  
Herndon

As a long-time subscriber and gift giver of *Virginia Wildlife*, I am always elated (and momentarily relieved) to find *Virginia Wildlife* buried in a stack of monthly bills. Needless to say, the bills are quickly discarded and I head for my easy chair to make a first pass at the current edition. I am always drawn to the Editor's Page, as I very much enjoy your writing style and the topics of your editorial column.

There have been several occasions over the years in which I intended to write to *Virginia Wildlife* and express gratitude for your efforts, but without fail multiple distractions intervened. In reading the November 1990 issue, and the letters from the "Unhappy Subscribers," I was compelled to put aside any and all distractions.

In an effort to avoid partroning the *Virginia Wildlife* staff, and without recounting the traditional "hunter's" perspective, my opinion can be simply stated . . . Keep up the good work! *Virginia Wildlife* provides a unique perspective and excellence in wildlife photography and commentary.

Thank you and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries for making *Virginia Wildlife* available to me.

Arthur R. Oberhofer, III  
Oakton

First, let me commend you on your efforts at producing such a fine magazine. Your works are greatly appreciated here in Virginia and by other lovers of outdoors outside the state.

The letters section of your November issue left me with mixed emotions. I certainly hope the only letters you receive aren't from dissatisfied readers. In reference to comments about the content of *Virginia Wildlife*, I would be very surprised if all articles were liked by all readers. I tend to use your magazine as I would television or newspapers. I look and read the stories and articles that are of interest to me (most of them), but I make no attempt to cover every word and phrase. But I feel that the ones I omit are of interest to others and that they probably skip the articles that I look at twice, even three times. As for those cancelling their subscriptions, I wonder, did they throw out their television they saw something they didn't like?

Also, a comment about the part of the magazine that I personally like best. An article that gives me a look into the mind of a person that I admire for having the ability to express feelings and ideas that most outdoors people share. I'm talking about the editorial page inside of the front cover. Just reading the editorial is well worth the price of the subscription.

Keep up the good work!  
P.S. Your setting the record straight was dead-on.

Gene S. Sampson  
Covington

I have read your magazine for many years and have enjoyed it thoroughly. Though you have recently come under fire from some of your subscribers for what they would call your pro-hunting stance (letters, November 1990 issue) I believe you have a winning formula and the majority of your subscribers are much more than satisfied.

Please keep up the good work on both non-sporting issues as well as the excellent hunting and fishing articles which have made your publica-

tion one of my favorites.

Your editorial comments made in response to those letters could not have been better.

William M. LeBleu  
Sandston

I have just read your response to "Unhappy Subscribers" in the November issue. I'd like to say Hurrah and Three Cheers!

I am not an active hunter—haven't been since I used to hunt with my Dad 60 some years ago but I wouldn't trade anything for my hunting experiences—working with dogs, learning about wildlife (and "tamelife," too), sharing these things with Dad and other hunting companions and all the rest.

Some of your correspondents are of the ilk that thinks lamb chops are formed pristinely in small packages in the back room of the supermarket. They have difficulty dealing with the realities of the world into which they were, unfortunately, born.

Keep up the good work—it's an outstanding publication.

Alfred Barnard  
Reston

I read in the November issue of *Virginia Wildlife* the several letters complaining about the content of the magazine. I strongly disagree as I feel the magazine is well done and serves its intended readers. I believe your response was well founded, and I concur in your views.

Please keep up the good work, and please note that I have extended my subscription to December 1999.

Stephen C. Conte  
Richmond

I'm not much with words, but I just had to say *thank you!*

First, for the November issue of *Virginia Wildlife*; each month gets better.

Second, for setting the record straight on the contribution "hunters/fishermen" have made and make toward wildlife enhancement.

One need only read the articles in this issue to see the educational purpose actually is more evident than anything else.

Third, thanks to the many professionals of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries for getting such great results with the funds available. When I was a youngster there were no deer or turkey in my area; now, even with hunting, both are increasing in numbers.

Enclosed is a \$30 check for three subscriptions to *Virginia Wildlife*. Please use them to replace those canceled by the "Unhappy Subscribers" in the November issue. No sense in wildlife suffering because they want to strike at hunters/fishermen.

P.S. I am neutral on the hunting issue, both sides have some valid points.

Tom Harvey

After reading the letters from "Unhappy Subscribers" in the November issue, I feel obliged to write a letter from a *very happy* subscriber. Your magazine is without a doubt one of the finest state publications of its type in the country. It's not unbalanced. The article *Tail Tales* is not going to prompt me to go out and hunt mice, weasels, flying squirrels and bats. It was just a great article about wildlife we enjoy, not hunt. And your sections on Family Outdoors, Habitat, Safety and Recipes can be enjoyed by all.

Your response to those letters in setting the record straight was outstanding! I get so sick of people who constantly bash hunters but who rarely contribute real money to maintain Virginia's wildlife populations. It's as though animal rights people are the only ones looking out for our wildlife, when in fact, it's the people who hunt and fish who are responsible for the bountiful wildlife we enjoy today. And we don't complain about subsidizing the subscriptions to *Virginia Wildlife* for all those people who are against hunting. At \$8.00 a year (when you subscribe for three years), it's still a bargain. So keep up the great job your doing, and stick to your stated goals and principles. I'm not about to cancel my subscription.

Robert A. Honold  
Alexandria

## Cemetery Habitats

by Nancy Hugo



photo by Pels

Every July, the Midwestern naturalist Aldo Leopold watched for the blooming of a single surviving *Silphium* plant in a corner of a country graveyard near his home. As long as the plant lived, he knew the prairie epoch survived with it, but one July a road crew had removed the fence protecting his plant, and he knew his plant, and the part of Wisconsin's history it represented, would be mowed away.

"It is easy now to predict the future," said Leopold, "for a few years my *Silphium* will try in vain to rise above the mowing machine, and then it will die. With it will die the prairie epoch."

That graveyards protect more than the souls of the departed, biologists have known for years, but cemetery habitats are getting renewed attention not only because they sometimes provide habitat for rare species but also because they represent a significant proportion of the only open space left in some urban areas.

Think about it. Not only are cemeteries usually protected from development, they are often home to old

trees and shrubs. Not for spook value alone do owls choose cemetery habitats. Even bats in the belfry, lichens on tombstones, and rare plants that like the high sandy lawn areas around grave sites are being studied by biologists. "If people continue to die, cemeteries may turn out to be natural habitats longer than woods and prairies," says the University of Michigan's W.H. Wagner who has been searching old cemeteries for rare plants for years.

Dr. Wagner's friend and colleague Dr. R. Dale Thomas of Northeast Louisiana University was one of the first to appreciate cemeteries as valuable habitats. Thomas, a botanist who also happens to be an ordained Methodist minister, has spent 25 years searching churchyards and cemeteries for rare plants. He has spent many an afternoon crawling on his hands and knees between tombstones to find the tiny 1-2" plants that are his specialty. His searches have led him to the discovery of extensive occurrences of five species of adder's tongue ferns and three species of grape ferns, all previously considered extremely rare. He found the only known colony of stalked adder's tongue in Virginia in a church lawn near Norfolk.

"He once told me you could find more adder's tongues in Baptist cemeteries than anywhere else," jokes Wagner. "That's because so many fire and brimstone preachers are buried there."

Bird-watchers in the Northeast have long been aware that cemeteries serve as refuges for migrating birds. Two hundred bird species have been recorded on the wildlife-rich grounds of the Mount Auburn Cemetery near Boston. Mount Auburn, the Congressional Cemetery in Washington,

D.C. and an increasing number of other cemeteries are actively managed for wildlife, with mowing heights adjusted to benefit wildlife and landscape plants chosen for their value to wildlife. Wildlife biologist Louise Dove argues that owners and managers of cemetery lands should be made aware of the opportunities available to provide habitat for wildlife in these areas. "With a few changes in planning and vegetation management," she argues, "more wildlife can be encouraged without restricting human use of the area."

Researchers have also studied cemetery habitats to see the degree to which they may function as "habitat islands." Isolated by the surrounding city in much the same way that island habitats are isolated by water, cemetery habitats have been found to exhibit some but not all of the principles of biogeography that apply to islands. We can't expect to find unusual species evolving in urban cemeteries the way they have in the Galapagos, but what we can expect, according to Louise Dove, is for cemeteries to contain some of the last examples of plant and animal communities that existed before the city grew up around them. If we can reduce the isolation of cemetery habitats and connect them to corridor systems allowing dispersion of plants and animals in and out of these refuges, cemetery habitats can also help replenish wildlife populations in other natural areas and accommodate species that require large home ranges.

What better way to serve wildlife—and prove there's life after death—than by inviting rare plants to grow on our grave sites and songbirds to perch on our tombstones? □

# Family Outdoors

## Keep a Nature Log

by Carl "Spike" Knuth

"Boy, this is the coldest winter I can remember!" "We've had more snow this year than last year!" "By this time last year, the bluebirds were already nesting!" Maybe you've heard statements like these concerning wildlife and weather.

I recall one recent example when an early snowfall caught us by surprise and many people were remarking how "it's never snowed this early before!" Yet, a check of weather records the year before showed that it had snowed on that very same date! People forget when they trust their memories.

Actually, Nature's seasonal events, including weather, are amazingly consistent, though changing slowly over a long period of time. While certain things can happen earlier or later in certain years, it's been my experience that most events or "happenings" in Nature seem to consistently take place from year to year within a 10-day "window," 14 days at the outside, more often than not within seven days and frequently within three days.

One good way of staying informed and keeping track of what is happening in the outdoor world, is to keep a daily diary or daybook. For many years now, I have kept what I call my "Hunting, Fishing and Nature Log Book." It first began as a fishing log, then a hunting log when I got involved in duck hunting in 1965.

In it, I would record the date, weather information such as temperature, wind velocity and direction, barometric pressure or cloud cover. I'd also note what water conditions were, what type of aquatic vegetation were present, how many fish I caught, what they are biting and how they are responding as it seemed to me.

Having been a "birder" since age

six, I couldn't resist listing some of the birds I saw. Since I fished mainly in spring, often they were the first of the year. After a long, cold Wisconsin winter, it was a significant event. I began circling the species if it was the first one of the year, so I began to build a record of migration patterns. I'd list each species I saw and even their numbers on many occasions.

Soon I was writing down any odd or unusual things I saw. I recorded bird behavior during migration, during breeding, during nesting and rearing of the young, during preparations of the fall migrations as well as wintering habits.

As part of my fishing log, I noted stages in vegetative growth through the seasons, recording the height of green shoots of cattails on a given date or when the red-osier dogwood bloomed or the first pussy willows showed, or when the first lilacs bloomed.

I really got serious with my log when I began duck hunting on big Lake Winnebago in east central Wisconsin. Again it was a record of dates, weather and waterfowl seen as well as their habits. The first flocks of a particular species were listed, when the largest flocks seemed prevalent through the season, how they "worked" back and forth and how they reacted to various decoy sets. Once again the "birder" in me started recording the last barn swallows to fly through or the first snow buntings from the arctic that came "bobbing" low over the northeast wind-driven waves.

It was duck hunting that turned me into a real weather watcher. My hunting buddies and I wanted to know where the wind would be blowing from and how strong it was so we could place our decoys accordingly. Running a set of 75 to 120 decoys was no small task.

There were some days when I didn't seem to have much to write about. It seems that you even have to be in the mood to keep a nature log! I'd often have to force myself to write something. To overcome "writer's block," I'd at least record the weather. However, sometimes just a walk down to the lake or in the marsh or around the yard would trigger something. There's always something to see and learn about in the outdoors. It's a never-ending supply of educational materials!

As years of Nature Logs were accumulated, my "data base" expanded. I could see patterns, consistencies and inconsistencies. I noted the unusual and the common. I began to realize the number of variables that affect our fish and wildlife when it came to weather, water levels, food supply and the effects of man's encroachment. I had a pretty good idea of when to start watching for certain species of birds to appear or leave and even where to look for them. I had a good idea of when certain wildflowers, shrubs and trees would be blossoming.

What's neat about a Nature Log is that when someone says, "it's never snowed this early before," or "the geese are late this year," you can check it out in past diaries. Keeping a Nature Log is an excellent way of putting you in touch with the outdoors. Start this year to record what you see at the backyard bird feeder, the habits of the individual species, the arrival dates in spring and departure dates in fall; the first leaves to sprout and the first to start turning in fall; first frost or freeze up and other weather information. Hunters and fishermen will feel an even closer kinship to the outdoors by recording pertinent data on a daily basis. Get closer to your outdoors! Start a Hunting, Fishing and Nature Log. □

# Safety

## It Could Happen to You

by William Antozzi, Boating Safety Officer

In Virginia and nationwide, most boating fatalities are caused by falls overboard. If those who perished in such a fall had been wearing a personal flotation device most all of them would not have drowned.

Harvey Lathbury, an experienced 59-year-old waterman was observed leaving Willis Wharf on the Machipongo River late in the afternoon on January 15, 1990. The water was calm. He had an 18-foot fiberglass fishing boat with a 40 horsepower outboard engine.

At about 3 p.m. another boater found Lathbury's boat, unoccupied, at the edge of a marsh, but did nothing about the situation. At about 3:45 p.m. Richard Bradford, a boater, noticed the empty boat, and became concerned. He looked at the nearby marsh area and noticed that there were no footprints on the ground and the marsh grasses appeared undisturbed. He called to other boaters who were nearby and they searched the area but found nothing. One of the worried boaters, Fred Harris of Exmore, notified the Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC) who, in turn, called U.S. Coast Guard Group Eastern Shore to request a search helicopter. VMRC officers hurried to the scene arriving at 7:45 p.m. Forty minutes later the USCG helicopter arrived.

The water area and marsh were searched by VMRC officers until 9:30 p.m. and the USCG helicopter personnel, using spotlights, continued to search until 3:30 a.m. The next day, the search continued until the USCG helicopter spotted the victim on the edge of the marsh.

The local coroner reported no signs of trauma and said that Lathbury was alive when he hit the water.



Had he been wearing a personal flotation device, his chance for survival would have been good.

On April 27, late in the afternoon, on a clear day Vernon Gallagher, age 80 and George Newton, age 78, both familiar with small boats, got into a 12-foot aluminum jon boat with a 6 horsepower outboard motor near Warsaw, Virginia. The water was calm with temperature about 65 degrees. Air temperature was 80 and there was very light wind; less than fives miles per hour.

The boat was launched and the two occupants prepared for a fun day. Two problems existed which would prove fatal. The small boat had only two "throw cushion" type four personal flotation devices, which cannot be worn, and the boat was overloaded. The vessel had only five inches of freeboard when empty and with the two men plus gear, there was considerably less.

Out on the water, the men started the small motor and headed for a favorite spot. Unfortunately, after about two miles, one occupant shifted weight to one side and the boat capsized, throwing both into the water. As they hit the cold water, an invol-

untary gasp pulled water into their lungs and they perished. Had they been wearing personal flotation devices both would probably have survived. Unfortunately, there were no wearable personal flotation devices on board. Wearables are not required by law on boats less than 16 feet in length and occupants of those small boats are very vulnerable if they are not wearing life-saving devices.

I was out on Lake Chesdin patrol, Sunday, June 23, about 4:30 p.m. when two occupants of a small boat came alongside to inform me of a drowning not far away. We hurried to the scene of the accident near Seven Springs Marina and discovered that Alphonzo Ramsey, 29 years old, of Petersburg, Virginia had fallen overboard from the swim platform of a powerboat. He had been standing on the platform while other boat passengers had their backs turned toward him. They heard a splash and found Ramsey in the water. The boat operator threw several personal flotation devices and a hydro-slide kneeboard to him, but he made no attempt to grab them. The boat operator, Bobby Vaughn, then jumped into the water and attempted a swimming rescue which was unsuccessful because of Ramsey's violent struggles. The victim then submerged. I called for the dive team from Chesterfield County and many attempts were made to recover the body, but to no avail. His body was found six days later.

On the day that Ramsey drowned, the water was quite calm, air temperature was 80° and water temperature about 70°. No one knows why he fell in, but if he had been wearing a personal flotation device, he would have lived. □

# *Available Now!*

*The Virginia Endangered Species Poster*

## VIRGINIA'S ENDANGERED SPECIES

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Treasures  
in Need of Protection  
and Restoration*



Proceedings of the Symposium on Virginia's Endangered Species  
Virginia Tech, April 28-29, 1989

Sponsored by  
Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries  
Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services  
Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation  
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**T**his 18" X 24" full-color poster was originally designed to grace the cover of the proceedings of the 1989 Virginia Endangered Species Symposium, and is now available and ready to frame for \$8, including shipping and handling.

Send \$8 for each poster ordered in a check made payable to the Treasurer of Virginia to: Virginia Endangered Species Poster Offer, Attn. Diane Davis, VDGIF, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA 23230-1104. **Special discount:** Save \$3 shipping and handling charges! Come by our Richmond office at 4010 West Broad Street (phone 804/367-1000) and pick up the posters for only \$5 each.

# Recipes

## Goose For Winter Entertaining

by Joan Cone

The wild goose of any species is a deceptive bird. It appears much larger than it actually is. An inch or more of feathers and down creates an illusion of gigantic size. When geese have just arrived after a long flight, there is not as much meat on the breast as you might expect. In general, a four to six-pound dressed goose will serve four to six people.

Most of us who cook wild geese do not stuff them, as the stuffing will have a tendency to become bitter. Usually an apple or onion is placed inside the cavity to absorb the strong flavor.

### Menu:

Mandarin Goose  
Virginia Mashed Yams  
Spinach-Artichoke Casserole  
Cheese Biscuits  
Spiced Pears

### Mandarin Goose

1 whole wild goose, 3 to 6 pounds,  
skin on  
Salt  
1 medium onion, cut in half  
1 tablespoon flour  
1/2 cup port wine  
1/4 cup orange juice  
1 tablespoon lemon juice  
1/2 teaspoon dry mustard  
1/4 cup currant jelly  
2 tablespoons cornstarch  
2 tablespoons cold water  
1 can (11 ounces) mandarin orange  
segments, drained

Heat oven to 350 degrees. Sprinkle cavity and outside of goose lightly with salt; place onion in cavity. Add flour to a large or turkey-sized Oven Cooking Bag and shake to distribute. Place bag in roasting pan. In small bowl, blend wine, orange juice, lemon juice and dry mustard. Add to cooking bag and stir with plastic or wooden spoon to blend in flour. Place goose, breast side up, in cooking bag. Close bag

with nylon tie and make six 1/2-inch slits in top of bag. Roast until almost tender, 15 to 20 minutes per pound. Slit cooking bag down center and roast until goose is brown, 15 to 20 minutes longer. Remove goose from bag; discard onion. Keep goose warm.

Strain juices from cooking bag into 4-cup measure. Skim fat. Add water if necessary to equal 2 cups. In medium saucepan, combine juices and jelly. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until jelly melts. In small bowl, blend cornstarch and water. Stir into jelly mixture. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until thickened and bubbly. Add mandarin orange segments to gravy; heat through. Serve gravy with goose. Serves 4 to 5.

### Virginia Mashed Yams

4 pounds yams or sweet potatoes,  
cooked and mashed  
1/4 cup melted butter or margarine  
1/4 cup bourbon whiskey  
1/3 cup orange juice  
1/3 cup firmly packed brown sugar  
3/4 teaspoon salt  
1/2 teaspoon mace  
1/2 cup pecan halves

Combine all ingredients, except pecans, in a large mixing bowl and mix well with electric beaters or by hand. Pour into a greased 2 1/2-quart casserole and arrange pecans on top. Bake in a 350 degree oven for 45 minutes or until hot throughout. Makes 6 to 8 servings.

### Spinach-Artichoke Casserole

3 packages (10 ounces each) frozen,  
chopped spinach  
1/4 cup margarine, melted  
1 package (8 ounces) cream cheese,  
room temperature  
1/2 cup milk  
2 jars (6 ounces each) marinated  
artichoke hearts, drained  
Grated Parmesan cheese

Cook spinach according to package directions and drain. Whisk together until smooth the melted margarine, cream cheese and milk. Add this mixture to the drained spinach and mix well. Stir in drained artichoke hearts. Pour into a 2-quart casserole; sprinkle Parmesan cheese on top. Heat in a 350 to 375 degree oven for 30 minutes or until hot throughout. Serves 4 to 6.

### Cheese Biscuits

2 cups sifted flour  
3 teaspoons baking powder  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
4 tablespoons cold shortening  
1/2 cup grated Cheddar cheese  
3/4 cup milk

Preheat oven to 450 degrees. Sift dry ingredients together; cut in shortening and add cheese. Add milk to make a soft dough. Place on a floured board and knead lightly a few seconds, using as little flour as possible on board. Roll out 1/2-inch thick and cut with floured biscuit cutter. Place on greased baking sheet and bake about 12 minutes. Makes 12 2-inch biscuits.

### Spiced Pears

3 ripe, firm pears, preferably Anjou  
2 cups Burgundy wine  
1/3 cup honey  
1 small bay leaf  
1 whole clove  
1 small cinnamon stick

Cut pears in quarters; remove core and peel. Combine wine, honey, bay leaf, clove and cinnamon stick in a saucepan and bring to a boil. Add pears and let cook uncovered, for 30 to 45 minutes or until tender. Let pears cool in cooking liquid and then refrigerate. □

December 1990 Recipe Correction: 2 cups of flour were left out of the recipe for the Grand Marnier Cake. We're sorry!

# Keep 'em Singing

*Donate today.*

*Help keep  
the woods  
full of song.*

Do your part for your neighbors. Help keep Virginia a good place for wildlife to sing in the spring, hibernate in the winter, and raise young in the summer. Donate to the Virginia Nongame and Endangered Species Program on line 29A of your state income tax form to help us keep an eye on endangered piping plovers, northern flying squirrels, and the rare barking tree frogs belting out summer ballads of love. Help us fund critical research and management programs for the state's nongame and endangered species.

